



Women's College Research Institute puts women's mental health at the forefront

Cindy-Lee Dennis, PhD, appointed as Shirley Brown Chair in Women's Mental Health Research

TORONTO, ON February 9, 2011 – Understanding, preventing and treating depression and other mental health issues in women continues to be a primary area of focus at Women's College Research Institute (WCRI) through the recent appointment of Cindy-Lee Dennis, PhD, as the Shirley Brown Chair in Women's Mental Health Research.

"Renowned in her field of study, Dr. Dennis brings a wealth of expertise to this area of research and will be a tremendous asset to our existing team of high-calibre scientists," says Dr. Paula Rochon, vice-president of research at Women's College Hospital. "Women's College has long been a leader in sex- and gender-based research, and Dr. Dennis will have the opportunity to build on the great work that has already been done, while advancing leading-edge research in the area of women's mental health."

The Shirley Brown Chair, named for a Toronto lawyer who succumbed to severe depression at the age of 39, was created with a mandate to address depression in women – a leading mental health issue today. In Canada, women aged 30–39 are twice as likely as men to suffer from severe depression, and of those, only 10 per cent receive adequate treatment.

"We are facing a global crisis in mental health," says Dr. Trevor Young, chair of the department of psychiatry at the University of Toronto. "Though it can carry as much social, psychological and occupational disability as some forms of cancer, diabetes, arthritis and heart disease, severe depression is under-treated and under-regarded as a serious medical illness. Research in the area of women's mental health is urgently needed."

As Shirley Brown Chair, Dr. Dennis will support an internationally recognized program of research and take the leading role in Canada in the drive to improve women's mental health by investigating the treatment and prevention of serious mental illnesses. The goal is to foster women's health research efforts, provide a focal point for advocacy on women's mental health issues and inspire junior colleagues.

"I'm excited to be part of an institution where women's mental health research is a critical priority," says Dr. Dennis. "My research will be inquiry-driven and rigorous. While it will consider the genetic, metabolic, hormonal, nutritional and pharmacological impacts on health and well-being – it will also consider the context of women's lives to better understand the social implications of women's mental health needs."

Dr. Dennis holds a Canada Research Chair in Perinatal Community Health, is an associate professor at the Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing at the University of Toronto and is cross appointed to the department of psychiatry. She is currently investigating the prevention and treatment of postpartum depression and has over 70 peer-reviewed publications related to diverse maternal and infant health outcomes including detection, prevention and treatment of postpartum depression.

The Shirley Brown Chair, one of seven endowed chairs and professorships held at Women's College Hospital Foundation, was established in 1996 in collaboration with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and the University of Toronto, and funded by the family and friends of Shirley Brown.

About Women's College Research Institute (WCRI)

Women's College Hospital has established the WCRI as Canada's largest research institute dedicated solely to generating knowledge about women's health.

As Canada's only facility that tests women's health-care innovations within an ambulatory care environment, WCRI is forging new ground by focusing on key areas of women's health and sex- and gender-based medicine: women and violence, mental health, genetics and cancer, obstetrics, osteoporosis, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS.

For more information, please contact:

Jodi Salem

Women's College Hospital

(416) 323-6400 x 4054

Jodi.Salem@wchospital.ca